

The Dealings of Captain Sharkey With Stephen Craddock.

By A. Conan Doyle.

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CAREENING was a very necessary operation for the old pirate, Captain Sharkey, in the heyday of his powers long ago. It was impossible to retain his sailing qualities unless he periodically—once a year, at the least—cleared his vessel's bottom from the long, trailing plants and crusting barnacles which gather so rapidly in the tropical seas.

During the weeks which were thus occupied the ship was, of course, defenseless; but, on the other hand, she was unapproachable by anything heavier than an empty hull, and the place for careening was chosen with an eye to secrecy, so that there was no great danger.

So secure did the captains feel, that it was not uncommon for them, at such times, to leave their ships under a sufficient guard and to start off in the long-boat, either upon a sporting expedition, or more frequently, upon a visit to some outlying town, where they turned the heads of the women by their

his name became notorious upon the American coast.

As a slave and even, as it was hinted, as a pirate, he had left an evil name behind him in the Bight of Benin. Finally, he had returned to Jamaica with a considerable fortune, and had settled down to a life of somber dissipation. This was the man, gaunt, austere and dangerous, who now waited upon the governor with a plan for the extirpation of Sharkey.

Sir Edward received him with little enthusiasm, for in spite of some rumors of conversion and reformation, he had always regarded him as an infected sheep who might taint the whole of his little flock.

"You came here to speak of Sharkey, Master Craddock," said he. "The man Sharkey is a vessel of wrath," said Craddock. "His wicked horn has been exalted over long, and it is borne in upon me that if I can cut him off and utterly destroy him it will be a good deed, and one which may atone for many backslidings in the past. A plan has been given to me whereby I may encompass his destruction."

The governor was keenly interested,

away, and a day and yet another night, without any sign of the men whom they were endeavoring to trap. It looked as if they were already gone.

On the second morning Craddock went ashore in search of some proof whether Sharkey and his men were still upon the island. What he found reassured him greatly. Close to the shore was a boucan of green wood, such as was used for preserving the meat, and a great store of barbecued strips of ox flesh was hung upon lines all around it. The pirate ship had not taken off her provisions, and, therefore, the hunters were still upon the island.

Why had they not shown themselves? Was it that they had detected that this was not their own ship? Or was it that they were hunting in the interior of the island, and were not on the lookout for the ship yet? Craddock was still hesitating between the two alternatives, when a Carib Indian came down with information. The pirates were in the island, he said, and their camp was a day's march from the sea. They had stolen his wife, and the marks of their stripes were still pink upon his brown back. Their ene-

At the thought he broke furiously away and tried to climb over to his boat, but a dozen hands were on him in an instant, and he was pushed off through the open door of his own cabin.

And it was all different to the cabin which he had left. The floor was different, the ceiling was different, the furniture was different. His had been plain and austere. This was sumptuous and yet dirty, hung with rare velvet curtains splashed with wine stains and paneled with costly woods which were pecked with pistol marks.

On the table was a great chart of the Caribbean sea, and beside it, with compass in his hand, sat a clean-shaven, pale-faced man, with a fur cap and a claret-colored coat of damask. Craddock turned white under his freckles as he looked upon the long, thin, high-nosed nose and the red-rimmed eyes which were turned upon him with the fixed, humorous gaze of the master player who has left his opponent without a move.

"Sharkey!" cried Craddock. "Sharkey's" thin lips opened, and he broke into his high, sniggering laugh.

"You fool!" he cried, and, leaning over, he stabbed Craddock's shoulder again and again with his right hand.

"You poor, dull-witted fool, would you match yourself against me. Now, Craddock, you know where you are. You are aboard the ship of the Happy Delivery, and you lie at my mercy. I knew you for a stout seaman, you rogue, before you took to this long-shore canting and moved into here, so cleaner than my own. Will you sign articles, as your mate has done, and join us, or shall I leave you over to your ship's company?"

"Where is my ship?" asked Craddock.

"Scuttled in the bay," said Craddock. "And the hands?"

"On the bay, too," said Craddock. "Then I'm for the bay also."

"Hock him and heave him over," said Sharkey.

Many rough hands had dragged Craddock out upon deck, and Galloway, the quartermaster, had already drawn his dagger to strike him when Sharkey came hurrying from his cabin with an eager face.

"We can do better with the bound!" he cried. "Sink me if it is not a rare plan. Throw him into the sailroom with the iron on, and do you come here, quartermaster, that I may tell you what I have in my mind."

So Craddock, bruised and wounded in the back, was thrown into the sailroom, and the door was closed upon him.

"Here's rum and biscuits," said the voice of his late mate. "It's at the risk of my life, Master Craddock, that I bring them to you."

"It was you who trapped me and caught me as in a snare!" cried Craddock. "How shall you answer for what you have done?"

"What I did I did with the point of a knife between my bladesbones," said Craddock. "How came you for a coward, Joshua Hird. How came you into their hands?"

"Why, Master Craddock, the pirate ship came back from his careening upon the very day that you, let us say, they laid us aboard, and short-handed as we were, with the best of the men ashore with you, we could offer but a poor defense. Some were cut down, and they were the happiest of us. They were killed afterward. As to me, I saved my life by signing on with them."

"They scuttled her, and then Sharkey and his men, who had been watching us from the brushwood, came off to the ship. His mainyard had been cracked and fished last voyage, so he had suspicions of us, seeing that ours was whole. Then he thought of laying the same trap for you which you had set for him."

Craddock groaned.

"How came I not to see that fished

mainyard?" he muttered. "But whither we bound?"

"We are running north and west," said Sharkey. "Then we are heading back toward Jamaica."

All that night and the next day the Happy Delivery ran before the easterly trades, and Stephen Craddock lay in the dark of the sailroom working patiently at his wrist irons. One he had slipped off at the cost of a row of broken and bleeding knuckles, but, of what he would, he could not free the other, and his ankles were securely fastened.

On the second morning Craddock became aware that some had been reduced in the vessel, and that she was tacking slowly, with a light breeze on her beam. If so, she must have reached Jamaica. But what could she be doing there?

And then suddenly there was a burst of hearty cheering from the deck, and then the crash of a gun above his head, and then the answering booming of guns from far over the water. Craddock sat up and strained his ears. Was the ship in action? Only the one gun had been fired, and though many had answered, there were none of the crashings which told of a shot coming home.

Then if it was not an action, it must be a salute. But who would salute Sharkey, the pirate? It could only be another pirate ship which would do that. Craddock lay back again with a groan, and continued to work at the manacle which still held his right wrist.

But suddenly there came the shuffling of steps outside, and he had time to wrap the loose links around his free hand when the door was unbolted and two pirates came in.

"What for, hammer, carpenter?" asked one, whom Craddock recognized as the big quartermaster. "Knock off his leg shackles then. Better leave the bracelets—he's safer with them on."

With hammer and chisel the carpenter loosened the irons.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Craddock.

"Come on deck and you'll see," said the other.

The sailor seized him by the arm and dragged him roughly to the foot of the companion. Above him was a square of blue sky cut across by the mizen mast, with the colors flying at the peak. But it was the sight of those colors which struck the breath from Stephen Craddock's lips, for there were two of them, and the British ensign was flying above the Jolly Roger—the honest flag above that of the rogue.

For an instant Craddock stopped in amazement, but a brutal push from the pirates behind drove him up the companion ladder. As he stepped out upon deck his eyes turned up to the main, and there again were the British colors flying above the red pennant, and all the shrouds and rigging were garlanded with streamers.

Had the ship been taken, then? But that was impossible, for there were the pirates clustering in swarms along the port bulwarks and waving their hats joyously in the air. Most prominent of all was the renegade mate, standing on the fo'c'sle head and gesticulating wildly. Craddock looked over the side to see what they were cheering at, and then in a flash saw how critical was the moment.

On the port bow, and about a mile off, lay the white houses and forts of Port Royal, with flags breaking out everywhere over their roofs. Right ahead was the opening of the palisades leading to the town of Kingston. Not more than a quarter of a mile off was a small sloop working out against the very slight wind. The British ensign was at her peak, and her rigging was all decorated. On her deck could be seen a dense crowd of people, cheering and waving their hats, and the stream of scarlet told that there were officers of the garrison among them.

In an instant, with the quick perception of a man of action, Craddock saw through it all. Sharkey, with that diabolical cunning and audacity which were among his main characteristics, was simulating the part which Craddock would himself have played, had he come back victorious. It was in his honor that the salutes were fired and the flags flying. It was to welcome him that this ship with the governor, the commodore and the chiefs of the island were approaching. In another ten minutes they would all be under the guns of the Happy Delivery, and Sharkey would have and yet greatest stake that ever a pirate played for yet.

"Bring him forward!" cried the pirate captain, as Craddock appeared between the quartermaster and the quarter-master. "Keep the ports closed, but clear away the port guns, and stand by for a broadside. Another two cable lengths and we will have them."

"They are edging away," said the boatswain. "I think they smell us."

"That's soon set right," said Sharkey, turning his filmy eyes upon Craddock. "Stand there, you—right there, where they can recognize you, with your hand on the gun, and wave your hat to them. Quick, or your brains will be over your coat. Put an inch of your knife into him. Try him again, then. Hey, shoot him! stop him!"

But it was too late. Relying upon the manacles, the quartermaster had taken his hands for a moment off Craddock's arm. In that instant he had swung off the carpenter, and amid a spatter of pistol bullets had sprung over the bulwarks and was swimming for his life. He had been hit and hit again, but it takes many pistol bullets to kill a resolute and powerful man who has his mind set upon doing something before he dies. He was a strong swimmer, and, in spite of the red trail which he left in the water behind him, he was rapidly increasing his distance from the pirate.

"Give me a musket!" cried Sharkey, with a savage oath. "He was a famous shot, and his iron nerves never failed him in an emergency. The dark head appearing on the crest of a roller, and then swooping down on the other side, was already half way to the sloop. Sharkey, with the crack of the gun the swimmer reared himself up in the water, waved his hands in a gesture of warning, and roared out in a voice which rang over the bay. Then, as the sloop swung round her headsails, and the pirate fired an impotent broadside, when Craddock, smiling grimly in his death agony, sank slowly down, that golden couch which glimmered far beneath him.

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for there was a grim and practical air about the man's freckled face which showed that he was in earnest. After all, he was a seaman and a fighter, and, if it were true that he was eager to atone for his past, no better man could be chosen for the business.

"This will be a dangerous task, Master Craddock," said he. "What was your plan?"

"You have heard that Sharkey's barque, Happy Delivery, came from this very port of Kingston?"

"It belonged to Mr. Codrington, and was taken by Sharkey, who scuttled his own sloop and moved into her because she was faster," said Sir Edward.

"Yes; but it may be that you have never heard the story. Codrington has a sister ship, the White Rose, which lies now in the harbor, and which is so like the pirate that if it were not for a white paint line none could tell them apart."

"Ah, and what of that?" asked the governor keenly, with the air of one who is just on the edge of an idea.

"By the help of it this man shall be delivered into our hands."

"And how?"

"I will paint out the streak upon the White Rose and make it in all things like the Happy Delivery. Then I will set sail for the island of La Vache, where this man is laying the wild oxen. When he sees me he will surely mistake me for his own vessel, which he is awaiting, and he will come on board to his own undoing."

It was a simple plan and yet it seemed to the governor that it might be effective. Without hesitation he gave Craddock permission to carry it out and to take any steps he liked in order to further the object which he had in view. Sir Edward was not very sanguine, for many attempts had been made upon Sharkey, and their results had shown that he was as cunning as he was ruthless. But this gaunt Puritan with the evil record was cunning and ruthless also.

Harvey was, above all things, necessary, for upon any day the council might be finished, and the pirates out at sea once more. But there was not very much to do and there were many willing hands to do it, so the second day saw the White Rose beating out for the open sea. There were only seven men in the port who knew the lines and rig of the pirate barque, and not one of them could see the slightest difference in this counterfeit. Her white side line had been painted out, her masts and yards were smoked to give them the dingy appearance of the weather-beaten rover, and a large diamond-shaped patch was let into her foretop-sail.

Her crew were volunteers, many of them being men who had sailed with Stephen Craddock before. The mate, Joshua Hird, an old slaver, had been his accomplice in many voyages, and came now at the bidding of his chief.

The averaging bark sped across the Caribbean sea, and on the fifth day they were at anchor in the Bay of Torbec, at the foot of the island of La Vache. Sharkey and his four men had been hunting. It was a well-wooded place, with the palms and underwood growing down to the thin crescent of silver sand which skirted the shore. They had hoisted the black flag and the red pennant, but no answer came from the shore. Craddock strained his eyes, hoping every instant to see a boat shoot out to them with Sharkey seated in the sheets. But the night passed

swims were his friends, and he would lead them to where they lay.

Craddock could not have asked for anything better; so early next morning, with a small party armed to the teeth, he set off under the guidance of the Carib. All day they struggled through brushwood, and clambered over rocks, pushing their way further and further into the desolate heart of the island. Here and there they found traces of the hunters, the bones of a slain ox, or the marks of feet in a morass, and once, toward evening, it seemed to some of them that they heard the distant fattle of guns.

That night they spent under the trees, and pushed on again with the earliest light. About noon they came to the ruins of bark, which, the Carib told them, were the camp of the hunters, but they were silent and deserted. No doubt their occupants were away at the hunt, and would return in the evening. So Craddock and his men lay in ambush in the brushwood around them. But no one came, and another night was spent in the forest. Nothing more could be done, and it seemed to Craddock that after the two days' absence it was time that he returned to his ship once more.

The return journey was less difficult, as they had already blazed a path for themselves. Before evening they found themselves once more at the Bay of Palms and saw their ship riding at anchor where they had left her. Their boat and oars had been hauled up among the bushes, so they launched it and pulled out to the bark.

"No luck, then!" cried Joshua Hird, the mate, looking down with a pale face from the poop.

"His camp was empty, but he may come down to us yet," said Craddock, with his hand on the ladder.

Somebody upon deck began to laugh. "I think," said the mate, "that these men had better stay in the boat."

"Why so?"

"If you will come aboard, sir, you will understand it." He spoke in a curious, hesitating fashion.

The blood flushed to Craddock's gaunt face.

"How is this, Master Hird?" he cried, springing up the side. "What mean you by giving orders to my boat's crew?"

But as he passed over the bulwarks, with one foot upon the deck and one knee upon the rail, a tow-headed man, whom he had never before observed aboard his vessel, glided suddenly at his pistol. Craddock clutched at the thow's wrist, but at the same instant his mate snatched the cutlass from his side.

"What roguesy is this?" shouted Craddock, looking furiously around him. But the crew stood in little knots about the deck, laughing and whispering among themselves, without showing any desire to go to his assistance. Even in that hurried glance Craddock noticed that they were dressed in the most singular manner, with long riding coats, full skirted velvet gowns and colored ribbons at their knees, more like men of fashion than seamen.

As he looked at their grotesque figures he struck at his brow with his clenched fist to be sure that he was awake. The deck seemed to be much drier than when he had left it, and there were strange, sun-blackened faces turned upon him from every side. Not one of them did he know save only Joshua Hird. Had the ship been captured in his absence? Were these Sharkey's men who were around him?

swaggering gallantry, or broached pipes of wine in the market square, with a threat to pistol all who would not drink with them.

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